



The Open Door Policy

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Do you have topic ideas? Comments or questions?

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An open-door policy that allows anyone access to the head person of an organization is not only a means to convey to all staff members that the leader truly does care about their issues and wants to learn from them, but also it is an effective way for the leader to constantly take the pulse of the enterprise. History shows that companies with open-door mechanism do better than those without.

At the same time the open-door approach must avoid creating an opportunity for misuse, or perhaps abuse, of the leader's very valuable time. (Remember that most leaders continually sacrifice family time to keep their organizations humming along.) There must be a balance between these two objectives.

What the Open-Door Policy Achieves

From an open-door policy, the leader:

- Conveys the idea that no person's idea is too trivial.
- Confirms that the boss is approachable and on the same or a similar level to everyone else in the company – just a mere human being, but the one entrusted with overall responsibility for the enterprise.
- Can learn from the large number of people that make up the majority.
- Can gain knowledge from the many people on the front lines - those in the thick of the battle (where the leader is not).

Avoiding Misuse of the Leader's Openness

When the staff members are advised that the head person is available to any participant in the organization, it should be subject to some guidelines, such as:

- The door to the leader's office will be open; so anyone may enter and request an audience.
- If the door is closed, it means the leader is engaged with another person or another activity so there should not be an interruption at this time.
- The employee, out of courtesy, should check with the leader if this is a good time to chat.
- The employee upon entering the boss's office should indicate to the leader the amount of time this discussion will take.
- The employee should be prepared in advance for this meeting by making notes, estimating the time required and the outcome expected.

Some Guidelines for the Leader

- Confirm with the person that you are available at this moment.
- Confirm that the amount of time requested is available (or make alternative arrangements).
- Make arrangements to hold your phone calls during this conversation.
- Make the visitor comfortable such as being seated across a coffee table. Never remain behind your desk.
- Confirm that what is being said will be treated with the appropriate confidence.
- Listen carefully. Do not defend. Do not disagree verbally. Use words such as "I see", "I understand", "I acknowledge", etc. You must validate the person's issue by listening – that is, convey that you hear it and will consider it. Otherwise the meeting will be wasted.
- Try not to offer a solution on the spot; instead offer what the next step would be.
- At the end, summarize your understanding of the conversation with the individual.
- Follow up as promised regarding the 'next step'.

Note: if you are in deep thought when a visitor arrives and really do not want to be interrupted, advise the person that you are 'busy' and should have had your door closed. However, suggest a time when you will be available. The reason for this is that if you carry on with the meeting when you really do not want to, your body language and tone of voice or deep sigh will convey that fact and the meeting will be less successful than it should be – and you can be sure that the 'lack of comfort' will be reported to the friends of the visitor.

For fuller details, ask for the CCCC Open-Door Policy document at ubilkhu@caswellccc.com

Best wishes,

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